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TIMES AIN'T LIKE THEY USED TO BE: RABBIT BROWN, NEW ORLEANS SONGSTER



"Little Dad" Vincent in 1959. Photograph by Florence Mars.

In 1900 they were everywhere. Singing on street corners, in front of circus entrances, or just moving down the dusty roads of the South, playing anywhere a crowd might be cajoled into donating a dime to the cause. To survive they played any request--ballads, popular tunes, white hillbilly music, hymns, and the newly

emerged blues. Songsters were the first folk musicians to be "professional." Southern social occasions required a wide variety of music and the songsters strived to fill the need. Essential was the ability to provide a steady dance beat, but on the street corner a sentimental number could bring forth both tears and coins. By the 1930's, however, the

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Tulane

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songster was becoming a thing of the past, nudged out by an expanding national entertainment industry that reached into the deepest parts of the South. Most songsters faded into the past. A few waxed recordings, leaving a tempting glance into their world--and many questions.

Such is the case with Richard "Rabbit" Brown, one of the most celebrated songsters and the only one from New Orleans to record. On March 11, 1927, Brown cut six sides for the recording pioneer Ralph Peer. An interesting mix of original blues, pop covers and "event" songs, this brief catalog represents all that is known for certain about him. Where was he born? Where did he die? How did he learn to play? Why did the few fellow musicians who recall him remember him as a "clown man" who sang "all the funny kind of songs--made up songs"?¹

In 1927 Richard "Rabbit" Brown was already at least middle aged. He was probably born around 1880, just as the first rumblings of Jim Crow moved across the South as the Federal army went home. The place of his birth remains a mystery. New Orleans usually receives the honor, but doubts cloud the issue. Local bluesman Ernie Vincent remarked on hearing the recording that Brown *sounded* like he came from north Louisiana or perhaps Mississippi. Indeed, Brown's vocal and phrasing does show hints of a rural origin, particularly if he is compared to singers like Joe Harris and Kid West, who hailed from New Iberia and had lived near Bunkie for a while.² Then there is Brown's testimony in "James Alley Blues": "Cause I was born in the country, she thinks I'm easy to rule." Brown sings the line with a conviction that seems to indicate that his woman did think he did come from the country. A rural origin for Brown also fits the general pattern of migration of African-Americans in the late nineteenth century. Thousands moved to the city to

escape sharecropping and festering racial tension which exploded at the turn of the century. Even if Brown was not born in rural Louisiana, his parents probably migrated into New Orleans shortly before his birth. The Browns would have settled in one of the "neighborhoods uptown above Canal Street." His father may have worked as a longshoreman or in the cotton presses. His mother might have sought work as a domestic. Regardless, poverty would have dogged them and they would have had to suffer the displeasing stares of the black Creoles.³

If Brown was not born in New Orleans he was probably there by 1890 because he composed a ballad about one of the most controversial events in New Orleans history. On the night of October 15, someone shotgunned Police Superintendent David Hennessey to death on Basin Street. Accusations fell on immigrant Italians, also suspected of being members of the Mafia. When a March trial ended in acquittal for six and a retrial for three others, a lynch mob descended on the parish prison and soon eleven men were shot or hanged for the murder. The lynching caused an international incident and captured the imagination of Brown. He composed a ballad in honor of Hennessey titled "The Downfall of the Lion." All that remains of the song is a verse recalled by guitarist Lemon Nash, who played with Brown in the 1920's:

"I'm gonna tell you racketeers,
Something you can understand,
Don't let your tongues say nothin'
That your head can't stand."⁴

Brown also took note of another incident central to the lore of the New Orleans underworld. "Gyp the Blood" told the story of the murder of restaurateur and bar owner Billy Phillips by Charles Harrison (a.k.a. "Gyp the Blood"), a New York hoodlum on



Chief Hennessey's murder as depicted in *The Mascot* (October 18, 1890).

the lam. Harrison was employed as a waiter at the Tuxedo Dance Hall owned by Harry Parker, a former business associate of Phillips. On Easter Sunday 1913, after several altercations, Phillips went to the Tuxedo to make up with Parker. While the two drank at the bar, Harrison stepped behind Phillips and fired a shot at the unsuspecting bar owner. A gunfight ensued, resulting in the deaths of Phillips and Parker. Public outrage at the violence forced the police to close the five dance halls in Storyville and helped to convince the authorities that closing the District might be a good idea. The closing of the dance halls also limited the places of employment for

musicians, some of whom later played the riverboats and began to move north. According to newspaper reports, no musicians were playing in the Tuxedo that night. Brown could have been there and obtained his information first-hand or he could have heard stories from other witnesses. One of those witnesses was a prostitute named Josephine Brown. Her relationship, if any, to Rabbit Brown is unknown, and, unfortunately, so is the text to "Gyp the Blood." Brown did not record the song, and no one recalled the words.

"The Downfall of the Lion" and "Gyp the Blood" reveal several aspects of Brown's life. First, he obviously knew the "sporting

life" of New Orleans well. Second, Brown was also aware that these stories attracted great attention and people wanted to hear about crimes. Such "event songs" composed a core of the songster tradition and served as a method of disseminating some of the more sensationalistic news stories before the consolidation of the tabloid press in the 1920's. How many event songs Brown knew is impossible to discover, but he knew at least two others. And it is known that his songs were original compositions, either dealing with local events such as the Hennessey and Tuxedo murders or one of the most important international events, the sinking of the Titanic.

The local event song that Brown chose to record recounted the 1914 kidnapping of Bobby Dunbar from a resort near Opelousas, Louisiana. Brown's song is the only musical account of the crime, which strongly suggests that "The Mystery of the Dunbar's Child" is a Brown original. If "Dunbar's Child" recounts an obscure event, "Sinking of the Titanic" tells one of the most famous disasters of all time. The underlying message of Brown's account is the need to be prepared for disaster at any moment. "None thought of danger, or what their fate may be," Brown sang. But "accidents may happen most any time, and we know not when an' where."⁵ Brown ends with a snippet of "Nearer My God to Thee," falsely believed to be the last song played as the ship sank. Nevertheless, Brown proves his familiarity with religious music by performing this popular hymn.⁶

"Sinking of the Titanic" brought Rabbit Brown a form of recognition seldom given to a songster in his time. Abbe Niles noted the song in his music column in *The Bookman* for July, 1928. The entire text of the song was reproduced and a meager biography, courtesy of Ralph Peer, also accompanied the lyrics. Brown "sang to his guitar in the streets of New Orleans, and he



Abbe Niles. Photo gift of Mrs. Abbie Kay.

rowed you out into Lake Pontchartrain for a fee, and sang to you as he rowed." His work exhibited "character," Niles said, but he was hard to understand, thus the transcription of the lyrics.⁷

Lemon Nash was one of the few musicians who remembered Brown. In an interview in 1959, he substantiated the portrait in Niles' article. Brown made his money playing on the streets of New Orleans' sporting district. He was a regular at Mama Lou's on Lake Pontchartrain. If "business was slow and [Brown] needed a ride home, he would turn in a false fire alarm." The firemen answered the call and found out it was only their friend, who sang to them as they went back to the station. "He knew all the firemen," Nash recalled, and they did not seem to mind the inconvenience.

For Nash, Brown seems to have been a comic figure with little musical talent. He "played so badly, I had to let him go," Nash remembered. "He just hit the guitar and yell." Brown was "what you call a clown

man.”⁸ Clarence “Little Dad” Vincent’s remark that Brown played “funny kind of songs” seems to reinforce Nash’s negative comments. Brown’s recordings, however, cast doubt on the validity of Nash’s opinion. They reveal a seasoned player capable of dexterity and deep expression, and in the gravelly voice, perhaps the faint origins of the New Orleans vocal growl may be heard.

Young Louis Armstrong may have heard Rabbit Brown because the two lived in the same neighborhood. Jane Alley, where Louis was born and Brown kept his main residences, lay in the “very heart of what is called ‘The Battlefield’ because the toughest characters in town used to live there, and would shoot and fight so much,” Armstrong wrote in his autobiography.⁹ In such a rough and tumble atmosphere, Brown needed to be tough and wily himself and may have supplemented his singing income with money from other, more questionable, activities.

That may account for some of Nash’s negative comments about Brown’s singing and playing. But more subtle reasons probably explain Nash’s resentment. Perhaps Nash envied the older man’s skill at hustling and singing. But style seems to be the main issue. Brown was a “clown man,” which may mean that he “put on” or “Tommed” for white people. For a man who witnessed the tightening of Jim Crow and the rash of lynchings in the early years of the twentieth century, proper deference to whites constituted a survival tactic. Younger musicians, unable to openly criticize the system, may have displaced their disdain onto an older man who represented what they feared the most. Regardless, Brown was a survivor who carefully cultivated relationships with white firemen and the conductors of excursion trains. Brown, to paraphrase a well worn blues line, laughed to keep from crying, and he survived.

On March 11, 1927, Brown secured his place in history. With Ralph Peer watching, he waxed six sides, excellent performances that only hint at his talent and wide repertoire. “James Alley Blues” was a semi-autobiographical excursion into his personal relations. “Dunbar’s Child” and “Sinking of the Titanic” illustrated his ballad composing ability and a sense of what people wanted to hear. “I’m Not Jealous” and “Never Let the Same Bee Sting You Twice” revealed a debt to popular published music, though the latter bore no lyrical resemblance to Cecil Mack and Chris Smith’s song of the same name. Victor Records never released “Great Northern Blues,” so what treasure it held may never be known. After the session Rabbit Brown collected his fee and walked into the mists of history.

Some authorities report that Richard “Rabbit” Brown died impoverished in 1937, but this has not been confirmed. “Richard Browns” died with regularity in New Orleans between 1927 and 1937. Brown may not have died in the Crescent City. Lemon Nash recalled that Brown had a nephew in Chicago. Perhaps he went to Chicago and played on Maxwell Street. Or maybe he visited relatives in rural Louisiana. He might have got religion as he aged and turned to the church. Wherever Rabbit Brown ended up, he still beckons from a distant time, a time that “ain’t like it used to be.”

Kevin Fontenot

ENDNOTES

1. Lemon Nash interviewed by Richard B. Allen, William Russell, and Harry Oster. October 3, 1959, New Orleans, and Clarence “Little Dad” Vincent interviewed by Richard B. Allen, November 17, 1959, New Orleans, both in Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

2. See John Cowley's notes to *I Can Eagle Rock: Jook Joints from Alabama and Louisiana, 1940-1941*, Travelin' Man TM CD 09. This compact disc includes the complete recordings of West and Harris made for John A. Lomax.

3. Quote from Joy Jackson, *New Orleans in the Gilded Age*, 2nd ed. (Lafayette: Louisiana Historical Association, 1997), p. 187. Jackson provides an excellent overview of African-American life in New Orleans during the period.

4. Note by Richard B. Allen in the Richard "Rabbit" Brown Persons vertical file, Hogan Jazz Archive.

5. Richard "Rabbit" Brown, "Sinking of the Titanic," on *The Greatest Songsters*, Document Records DOCD-5003, which includes his complete recordings with the exception of "Great Northern Blues," which seems to be lost. For an overview of the

songster tradition, see Paul Oliver, *Songsters and Saints* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 20-23.

6. The last song played on the Titanic was probably "Songe d'Automne." For an excellent discussion of the Titanic's impact on popular culture, see Steven Biel, *Down With the Old Canoe: A Cultural History of the Titanic* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1996).

7. Abbe Niles, "Ballads, Songs, and Snatches," *The Bookman* LXVII, no. 5 (July, 1928), 565.

8. Nash interview. Brown also played on train excursions to Baton Rouge, which suggests that he might even have been present at the picnic where Bobby Dunbar was kidnapped.

9. Louis Armstrong, *Satchmo: My Life in New Orleans* (New York: DaCapo Press, 1986; originally published 1954), pp. 7-8.

CURTIS D. JERDE, 1939-1998

One of the least welcome responsibilities of the staff at the Hogan Jazz Archive is the collection of obituaries documenting the departure of New Orleans musicians and others who constitute the jazz family here. In recent years, the losses have been staggering, including the Humphrey brothers, Danny and Blue Lu Barker, Pud Brown, Ed Frank, Louis Barbarin, Al Rose, and William Russell, to mention only a few. In 1998, such losses have hit especially close to home with the deaths of Curtis D. Jerde and Betty Rankin (see below), and we respectfully dedicate this issue of the newsletter to them. It is especially

appropriate to remember Curt Jerde in *The Jazz Archivist* because he was its founder. After he became curator of the Hogan Jazz Archive in 1980, Curt began to expand the Archive's outreach efforts in a number of ways. In an effort to utilize the archive's extensive sheet music holdings, Curt helped establish the Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble in 1980, as the performing arm of the Hogan Jazz Archive. The band, which remains active today, performs classic New Orleans jazz in the authentic styles of the 1900-1930 era. Its repertoire includes blues, stomps, rags, hymns, cakewalks, spirituals, and marches.



Curtis D. Jerde with sousaphone.

Curt's love for New Orleans and its music was not restricted to jazz. In 1981 and 1982, he served as founder and producer of the New Orleans Gospel Music Conference, which he described as a conference combining musical performance with a workshop-clinic and a scholarly seminar. The concept intended to galvanize the academics of the gospel sound and derive therefrom an archive of research materials. Dr. Thomas A. Dorsey, composer of the gospel music standard, "Precious Lord Take My Hand," was the guest of honor for the first conference, which resulted in the archive acquiring over 50 of Dorsey's compositions and other gospel music related memorabilia. In 1982, in conjunction with the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, he organized the first Tulane Hot Jazz Classic, which was conceived as an international festival of classic jazz. Programming included a night of jazz films, colloquia to discuss the development of the musical style, concerts featuring bands and individual musicians from throughout the United States and around the world, and a jazz reunion to honor musicians who played jazz in New Orleans prior to 1940. A full

roster of Hot Jazz Classic programs was produced in 1983, independent of the Jazz & Heritage Festival.

Curt was instrumental in the radio production, "Tulane Jazz Listening Library. On the Air"/"Louisiana Swing," a series of radio programs created to showcase materials from the collection of vintage 78 r.p.m. jazz recordings housed in the Jazz Archive. Programming was made possible through grants from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities. To bring these valuable resources to a wider range of public appreciation, the archive engaged in a cooperative broadcast endeavor with New Orleans NPR outlet, WWNO-FM, which aired portions of the programs in 1989.

During Curt's tenure as curator, he aggressively sought international recognition for the Hogan Jazz archive. He published several journal articles about the music and its players, and coordinated many in-house exhibits capitalizing on the many reference works at his disposal. His grant-writing initiative allowed the archive to draw upon fiduciary resources independent of the university's budget for growth and development of the collection. In addition, he gave the archive a stronger public presence with the creation of a community support organization-The Friends of the Jazz Archive, comprised of distinguished academicians, jazz specialists, music lovers, and musicians of national and international repute.

Curt Jerde's interest in jazz was well in place by the time he came to New Orleans in 1978 to work on a doctorate in the Department of History at Tulane. He had been active as a bass player for years in San Francisco, and I remember his amazement when we learned that we had a friend in common in the San Francisco cast of "Hair," to which Curt had belonged as a band member, as well as sharing stories about The



Curt with the Rep. Photo by Michael P. Smith.

Trident in Sausalito. From the beginning, Curt had no difficulty finding work as a musician in New Orleans, joining Dick Stabile's big band at the Fairmont's Blue Room almost immediately and then going on to work with Eddie Bayard's Classic New Orleans Jazz Orchestra. Perhaps his most abiding musical connection, however, was with the Louisiana Repertory Jazz Ensemble, which he co-founded with S. Frederick Starr shortly after becoming Curator of the Archive. The Rep, as it was often called, had a weekly night at The Maple Leaf Bar on Oak Street, where it became a center of attention for lovers of vintage jazz and especially the dance crowd. Tulane people, such as the artist Franklin Adams, could be seen regularly strutting their stuff to the sounds of the Rep, and media crews from local television stations began to show up to get the scoop on this new and arcane musical attraction. Members of the band would introduce the songs with historical anecdotes, providing the stories behind the songs or discoursing

on the elements of New Orleans style, but always with a pronounced spirit of fun which sustained the spontaneity of the presentation and kept the proceedings lively. From those humble beginnings, the Rep went on to become an international attraction, performing in the Soviet Union and at the Bohemia Club, a secluded northern California getaway that attracted the nation's political and corporate who's who.

Curt's debilitation due to multiple sclerosis and untimely death ended a promising academic career dedicated to illuminating the prehistory of jazz in New Orleans, with special attention to the string band traditions which predominated during the nineteenth century. Working with the notes taken by Henry Kmen for the sequel to *Music in New Orleans: The Formative Period, 1791-1841* (1968), Curt was exploring how ethnic and racial diversity operated within the Crescent City's music scene prior to the advent of jazz. Some of his findings were included in "Black Music in New Orleans: A Historical

Overview," *Black Music Research Journal*, 10 (Spring, 1990), a piece which correlated the strength of band traditions within the black community to the high incidence of free blacks residing in the city before the Civil War. Curt's activities as a scholar, and his desire to increase the Archive's visibility as a proactive force in jazz research through exhibits, participation in academic conferences, and this newsletter, reflected his true dedication to promoting jazz studies as a worthy and important element in American cultural history.

Curtis Jerde's tenure at the Hogan Jazz Archive lasted almost exactly one decade. During that time he never stinted in applying himself fully to the business of building a better collection (he was instrumental in bringing in the Ray Bauduc donation, for example) and to bringing it into conformance with prevailing archival standards. As we continue much of the work that he set in motion, we think of him often.

Alma Williams and Bruce Boyd Raeburn

TAMPEEKOE



"Pimienta Rojas" (Red Hot Pepper) Radio XEFW Band in 1932, photograph courtesy of Archivo Historico de Tampico.

From far-away times, there has always existed a great cultural similarity among the town settlers in the river deltas along the Gulf of Mexico. The interchange that has prevailed among them has allowed this similarity to occur. Certain customs, food, even musical rhythms are very similar. The result of the co-existence among the

African-Americans, Hispanics, and Anglo-Saxons gave birth to musical expressions such as jazz, which is no more than a mixture of African and Antillean rhythm and western musical scales. Here I wish to pause and try to make a sketch of what happened at the beginning of the century especially between the ports of Tampico and

New Orleans, when jazz music first came to public attention, helped by the starting of the record and radio industries.

Tampico

In the first decades of this century, the Mexican city of Tampico witnessed the emergence of new rhythms that were sprouting hand-in-hand with a new and modern cultural sensibility. It's not strange that it was precisely through this port that the modern music came: Fox Trot, Charleston...all the dances of Jazz. Suddenly Tampico's night clubs were jammed with dancers wanting to hear new orchestras. At the beginning, these bands usually adopt the name of the place where they played, thus making it easy for the public to recognize them. As a result of this, we had groups such as "Jazz Band Opera" from Opera Cabaret (1923), "Magnolia Jazz Band" from Magnolia Park (1923) or the

female orchestra "Okeh" which probably got its name from the record company made famous by Mamie Smith's 1920 rendition of "Crazy Blues" (1923). Further down the road, new private orchestras were formed, led by Directors such as Professor Bennie Naylor of The Jazz Band, who played in places like The Beach Club San Luis (1926). The first music band to appear with a name of its own in the publicity signs is "The Original Five" directed by Professor Vicente Larios at The Suizo Bar (1926). The groups started to have a wider circulation throughout the region through radio broadcasting stations, as can be read in a newspaper article of 1925 where "the receiver and transmitter radio station C & Q from the Casa Sagaon programs a Fox Trot called "Laredo Blues" executed by the Jazz Band directed by Professor Rivera." There is a song title, "Centenario," by Clifton



New Orleans Owls at the Venetian Room, Roosevelt Hotel, New Orleans, circa 1927. Photo by C. Bennett Moore, gift of Frank Netto.

Worey: this song was recorded by Banda Latino-Americana Diamante Azul in June, 1922 (Okeh 16018), possibly for the Tampico centennial in 1923.

New Orleans

We have always been conscious of the existence of communication between Mexican and American musicians. We can mention "The Original Imperials Aces" as an example, who moved to Tampico to play at The Manhattan Bar (1923). The fluency among musicians also continued on board the steamships that went back and forth between Tampico and New Orleans. Also notable is the case of "The New Orleans Owls," that performed on board the United Fruit Company vessels and played pieces such as "Tampeekoe" by Louie Panico and Elmer Schoebel (Columbia 688-D, recorded on April 24, 1926) with lyrics by Walter Melrose:

"Below the grand old Rio Grande
you'll find a town they call Tampeeko,
That's where my baby is waitin'
night and day,
When I get back I know
she'll vamp my blues away,
That's why I say: I'm Tampeeko bound.

I'm leavin' tonight
On a pull-man greyhound,
'Cause that gal of mine is callin' back home.

And when I arrive,
I'll jump right in bed
With a jinx on my woe,
Paradise and me will meet in Tampeekoe".

There is still much to investigate, but the window has been opened. Let us allow the summer breeze to enter and refresh our memory, while we listen to that old blues tune.

Jose Castaneda

CURATOR'S COMMENTARY

I would like to begin by thanking our former graduate student worker Dirk Van Tuerenhout, who completed his Ph.D. in Anthropology at Tulane last May, for nine years of outstanding service to the Hogan Jazz Archive. Dirk was the person who did the layout for *The Jazz Archivist* during that time, creating a look which we have attempted to retain in this issue, and for a while we were wondering if it would be possible to get the newsletter out without him. We dedicate this issue to Dirk, who will now be able to simply sit back and read one for a change. Bravo and best of luck, Dirk!

Some of our contributors are new to the newsletter and represent a broad cross-section of our constituency. Kevin Fontenot is a Ph.D. candidate in History at Tulane, currently preparing a dissertation on former Louisiana Governor Jimmie Davis. Kevin has long been a friend to the Archive, donating clippings and related ephemera for the vertical files. His article on songster Richard "Rabbit" Brown is an attempt to shed new light on one of the earliest and most mysterious bluesmen active on the New Orleans scene. Jose Castaneda of Tampico, Mexico, has followed the work of Jack Stewart on the influence of Mexican bands on New Orleans music and offers his perspective on the cultural reciprocity which informed relations between these two port cities. His contribution is intended as a preview of more in-depth work to come. John McCusker is a photographer for New Orleans *Times-Picayune* who has become famous for his jazz tours and for his dramatic portraits of jazz musicians. Previously, he has shared information uncovered in the process of research on the early life of Kid Ory. Now, his interest in turn-of-the-century brass bands such as the Onward is adding significantly to our

understanding of this band's Cuban experience.

Jack Stewart has recently been working strenuously on compiling a comprehensive listing of Reliance Band sidemen but has taken time out to concentrate on Cuban connections to New Orleans. His current contribution is on Cuban influences on and parallels to New Orleans music, a piece also appearing on the Arhoolie Records website as a companion to their recent release of a CD of early Cuban music. The willingness of these contributors to make the results of their research available to the readership of *The Jazz Archivist* is the foundation on which the success of the newsletter rests and says a lot about the vitality of jazz scholarship.

Meanwhile, one of the occupational hazards of producing a newsletter such as this is that one occasionally lets some misinformation slip by: in the "Jewish Jazzmen" article last issue there are three corrections that should be made. Julian Laine as Papa Jack's son is incorrect--they were not related (thanks to Dick Allen for catching it). Second, the photograph of Mars' band includes Monty Korn, not Marcus. Third, the band that Eddie Edwards remembered as his favorite, with Achille Baquet and Mike Caplan was not "pre-ODJB" but probably from 1919, during his hiatus from the band (thanks to Jack Stewart and Lawrence Gushee for this information). As anyone who has participated in jazz scholarship knows, it is a cooperative enterprise, and we are grateful to the many friends who assist with the collective effort, so corrections are always welcome.

The necessity of combining two years' issues results from dislocations accompanying our relocation to 304 Joseph Merrick Jones Hall last August. The Hogan Jazz Archive now has a fresh, new look and more space, which was the imperative driving the search for new quarters.

Hopefully, the expanded format will compensate for the long wait. Given our staff situation, it is unlikely that we will return to two issues per year any time soon. An annual edition coming out in May will still be a challenge, but our expectation is that we can handle that and yet keep standards high and even improve them.

Thus, flexibility in the face of ineluctable change will be our theme for the days ahead, but tempered, one hopes, by a constant intellectual curiosity and the desire to learn more about the mysteries of early New Orleans jazz. Obviously, there is still plenty to learn, and judging from the number of film crews and journalists who call upon the Archive for information and insight, we are not alone in our quest. Tulane students in English 101 classes, English as a Second Language students, members of the Mississippi River Basin Colloquium, and many others have regularly used the Archive's facilities in search of information on the special features of the New Orleans music scene. It would seem that public interest in New Orleans jazz remains surprisingly high, fed by the ongoing power and beauty of the music. Next year we can expect broadcast of Ken Burns' series on jazz for PBS, which should do much to sustain and expand interest in New Orleans jazz. In addition, there are film projects currently under way on women instrumentalists in jazz, Louis Prima, Louis Armstrong, Danny Barker, and Jewish music in America, with reference to jazz, all of which share a New Orleans component.

For the Friends of the Jazz Archive, we ask that you consider the arrival of this issue as a call for annual dues (still \$15) to assist in underwriting the cost of producing the newsletter--dues account for about 25% of the production expenses--which we then make available gratis to patrons and visitors alike.

Bruce Boyd Raeburn

IN MEMORIAM

Betty Rankin, perhaps better known to New Orleans jazz lovers as "Big Mama" from her traditional jazz show on WWOZ-FM, passed away on February 24, 1998 at Touro Infirmary. Mrs. Rankin first came to New Orleans in 1957 with her husband, Hugh "Big Daddy" Rankin, a professor of History at Tulane, and was on hand when the Archive of New Orleans Jazz first took shape under William Ransom Hogan, William Russell, and Richard B. Allen. From 1959-1970 she served faithfully as an associate curator, assisting with transcription of the oral history interviews and helping in innumerable ways with the building of the collection. In 1971 she began working with the Jazz & Heritage Festival, then in its infancy, and ten years later signed on with WWOZ as the volunteer host of one of that

station's longest-running and most popular jazz programs. The volunteer spirit was alive and well in Betty Rankin throughout her life in New Orleans, and those who worked with her or had occasion to meet her (in the second line or elsewhere) will fondly remember the good will that she spread so effortlessly. "She got to know everybody and got involved on a personal level," recalled Dick Allen for a feature in the *Times-Picayune*. "It was a spiritual kind of thing. She loved the music and believed in the dignity of the musicians." Photographer Matt Anderson captured that feeling in the shot below and recently donated this print to the Archive in Betty's memory. It is a fitting remembrance of a women whose penchant for giving will never be forgotten at the Hogan Jazz Archive.

Bruce Boyd Raeburn



Betty "Big Mama" Rankin (center right) with Belle Street, Jules Cahn, and Dick Allen at the Tulane University Center Quadrangle in 1978. Photograph by Matt Anderson.

CUBAN INFLUENCES ON NEW ORLEANS MUSIC

The vernacular musics of New Orleans and Cuba around the turn of the 20th century share certain similarities. The danza, danzon, and son of Cuba have their counterparts in the pre-ragtime, ragtime, and jazz of New Orleans.¹ There are even parallel controversies concerning the true ethnic origins of these twin musical traditions.²

At first hearing, the common musical features of the two cultures may be obscured by the obvious differences between them. While New Orleans and Cuba have a similar multi-cultural heritage (African, Amerindian, Spanish, Italian) that developed on the rims of the Gulf of Mexico, the Gulf served to both unify and separate the respective cultures. As separate shaping forces, the Mississippi River cultural system fed into New Orleans from the north and the pan-Caribbean cultural system fed into Cuba from the south. Louisiana and Cuba are not a great distance apart: only six hundred ninety-four miles separate New Orleans and Havana. Until thirty-five years ago, the two cities were on the same trade routes; ships entering the Gulf of Mexico would go directly from one city to the other. In addition to the passenger ship service that existed, the passenger accommodations available on commercial freighters provided an inexpensive shuttle service between the two places.³ Travel between these cities was further enhanced by their dual reputations as exotic "good time" capitals.

There was early Cuban immigration to New Orleans, the first significant group coming in 1809. These were actually refugees from the Haitian Slave Revolution that took place in Saint Domingue from 1791 to 1804. They first sought asylum in Cuba in 1803 but, after six years residence there, were expelled in an anti-French purge

by Marques de Somerueles, Captain-General of Cuba because of Napoleon's high-handed nepotism in Spain.⁴ The Saint Domingue refugees that found their way to New Orleans were about nine thousand in number and were listed by the immigration census as approximately one-third "whites," one-third "free persons of color," and one-third "slaves."⁵ Most of the "whites" listed were undoubtedly of French origin and the "slaves" were probably from the French-African colony of Dahomey, the dominant slave group on Saint Domingue.⁶ Some of these latter, however, may have been slaves acquired in Cuba, in which case they may have been Yorubans from the West African region of Curabalis or Lucumi, near the Niger Delta.⁷ A few could also have been Mandingos originating in Senegal, Liberia, or Ashanty. These were the areas from which the collective slave population of early French and Spanish New Orleans originated.⁸ The "free persons of color" are the most intriguing: they were probably a mulatto blend of the whites and slaves on the island or free people of African origin who came to the Caribbean via Europe.

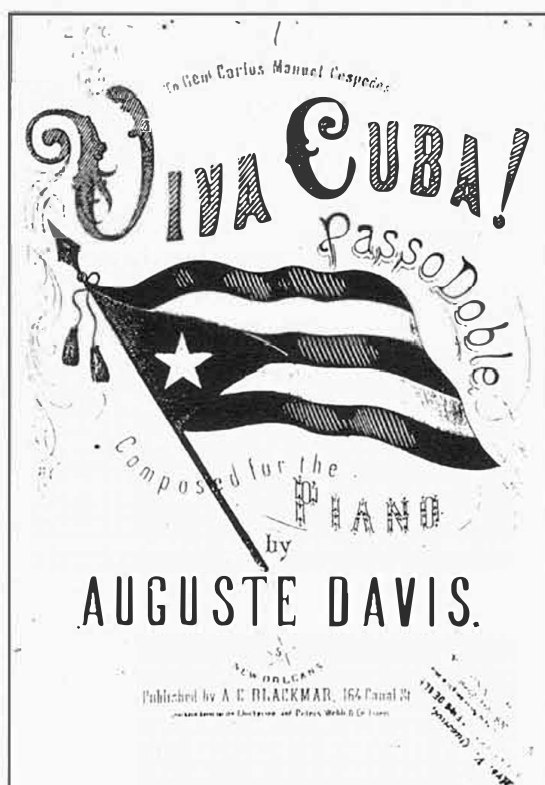
Although documentation for the period is scant, New Orleans street culture in the 1810's and 1820's was enlivened by a few high-profile itinerant performing groups with possible Cuban connections and that may well have included music.⁹ On April 3, 1816 "Signore Gayetano" Mariotini presented his famous travelling circus in a wooden stadium in New Orleans' Place Publique.¹⁰ The Place Publique was an open public space adjacent to the Carondelet Canal (or Old Basin Canal, as distinguished from the later New Basin Canal) and in front of Fort St. Ferdinand, one of five forts on the perimeter of the original city. Gayetano's Circus became a "popular fixture"

(according to Lafcadio Hearn) on the Place Publique, which came to be called Place du Cirque and, later, Congo Square.¹¹ Though primarily an equestrian show, Gayetano's troupe included a Spanish dancer and acts that were accompanied by such syncopated pieces as hornpipes.¹² Did this music sound in any way Cuban? Gayetano, a native of Italy, probably came to New Orleans via Havana, and his Spanish dancer may have been added to his production there.

The early opera culture of New Orleans had important input from Cuba. John Davis, a ballroom operator of French origin (Jean Davis), was one of the Saint Domingue refugees. He arrived in New Orleans in 1809, with the group that came through Cuba, and it is possible that he was involved himself in theater productions in Havana. When the Orleans Theater burned down in 1816, Davis bought and rebuilt it. The newly enlarged theater (with a ballroom and a hotel attached) re-opened in November 1819 and became the center of New Orleans opera life for the next two decades, with an almost exclusive emphasis on French opera, including many American premieres. The New Orleans opera scene was enriched in the 1830's by the arrival of a rival impresario, John Caldwell, who featured English language opera for the consumption of the burgeoning American population in the city. The energetic Caldwell built two theaters, the Camp Street Theater and the larger St. Charles Theater, and he brought in companies from Cuba. The first of these, in 1836, was the G. B. Montessoro Italian troupe fresh from successes in London, New York, and Havana. Later that season Caldwell brought in the Havana company directed by Francis Brichta, considered by many to be the best opera troupe in the Americas.¹³ The star of this company was Madame Pantanelli, who came to the St. Charles Theater with a personal

endorsement from Rossini; she had created a sensation at Havana's Tacon Theater.¹⁴ Another Italian sensation at the Tacon was the tenor Fornasari, who came to New Orleans in May 1836 to sing the lead role in *The Barber of Seville*. Along with these soloists and a company chorus, Brichta brought three string players to cover the first viola, cello, and double bass positions in the local orchestra, as well as the conductor Luigi Gabici. Gabici achieved prominence in New Orleans as a composer, publisher, and music teacher who had among his many students two Creoles-of-color: composer Edmond Dede and Thomas Tio, the first Tio family clarinet player, teacher, and grandfather of the jazz clarinetist, Lorenzo Tio, Jr.. Gabici was also active in the New Orleans opera world for several decades.¹⁵

There were, of course, long-standing political connections between New Orleans and Cuba. In 1823 John Quincy Adams enunciated a "law of political gravity" whereby, just as an apple must fall to the ground, so must Cuba one day fall to the United States.¹⁶ Accepting this expression of "manifest destiny," New Orleans looked keenly to Havana as a future sister city under American government. Several bronze plaques in the 500 block of Poydras Street commemorate the site of a building, now demolished, where the Cuban liberation flag was flown in 1850. The plaque marks the spot where Narcisco Lopez, after trying in other American cities, finally succeeded in raising an expedition to liberate Cuba. Lopez made two vain attempts to invade Cuba with a small force recruited in New Orleans. After escaping to Key West failing a first attempt in 1850, they were captured on the second try, and fifty-one men were executed. In response, a riot broke out in New Orleans, and the Spanish Consulate was attacked. New Orleans leaders vigorously supported the Ostend Manifesto



Auguste Davis' "Viva Cuba!"



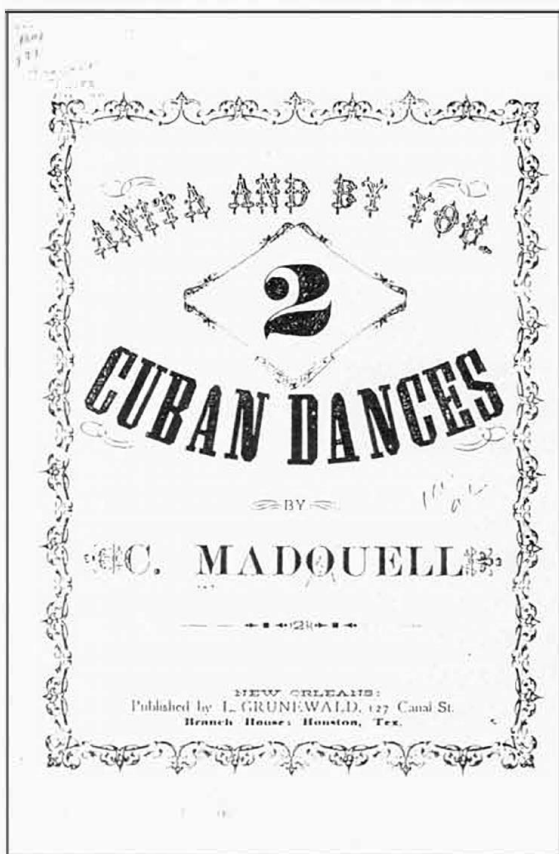
Gottschalk's "Ojos Criollos."

in 1854, which resolved to wrest Cuba from Spain if it would not sell the island. But when Cuban insurrection finally did break out in 1868, New Orleans, itself in the throes of the turmoil of Reconstruction, was unable to support the effort. There was some musical response to all this political unrest. In 1869, A. E. Blackmar published *Viva Cuba: Passo Doble*, a Hispanic style piece in 6/8 time, composed by Auguste Davis.

At least two other world-famous performers made their way from Havana to New Orleans in the mid nineteenth century. One was the ballet dancer, Fanny Elssler, who appeared at the St. Charles Theater in March of 1840. She had mastered several Cuban dances in Havana, such as the *zapateado*, and one can guess that she performed these exotic dances in her New Orleans performances. Another Cuba-to-New Orleans performing event was the appearance of the "Swedish Nightingale,"

Jenny Lind. As part of an American tour organized by P. T. Barnum, the famous soprano appeared for a month each in Havana and New Orleans, where she gave thirteen concerts at the St. Charles Theater.¹⁷ The famous New Orleans composer, Louis Moreau Gottschalk, made regular trips to Cuba in the 1850's and early 1860's, where he immersed himself in the Cuban musical scene, befriending such distinguished Cuban composers as Manuel Saumell Robreno, Nicolas Ruiz Espadero, and Ignacio Maria Cervantes.¹⁸ Their influence can be seen in Gottschalk's Cuban-flavored compositions, *Ojos Criollos* and *Danse Cubaine*, published in 1860. Gottschalk's interest in Cuban music may have spawned a vogue for Cuban danzas in the United States in the mid nineteenth century.

Such composers as Saumell and Cervantes turned out a considerable number of two-part danzas for piano, most of which

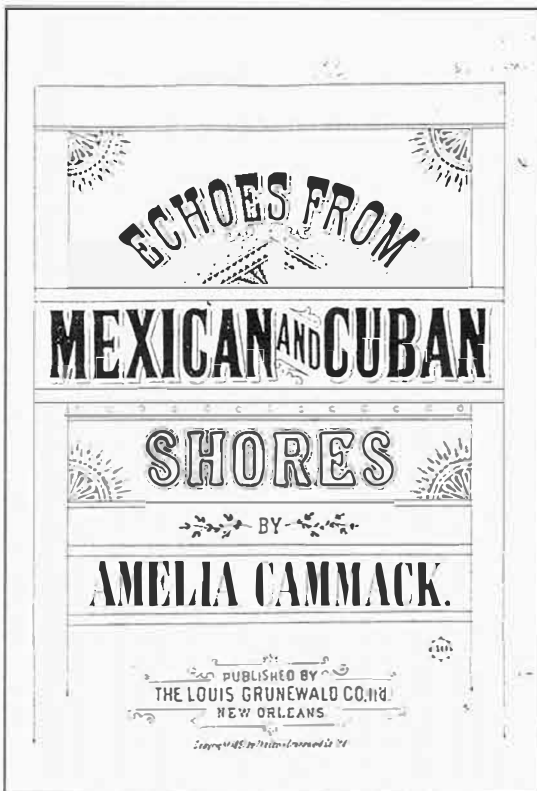


Maduella's "Two Cuban Dances."

were originally published in magazines rather than as sheet music. The melody line (or right hand) rhythms of the finales of many of these pieces are identical to the finales of cakewalks. In fact, these same syncopated riff figures are common to various Cuban and American forms ranging from early minstrel show tunes such as *Zip Coon (Turkey in the Straw)*, Saumell's and Cervante's danzas, Gottschalk's "Cuban" pieces, cakewalks, ragtime, the Cuban rumba rhythm, and son clave. These all make prominent use of tied-note syncopation figures common to habanera and clave rhythms.¹⁹ According to some contemporary New Orleans musicians, this rhythmic feel is the underlying element in the conversion of the standard New Orleans 4/4 beat to the syncopated form now used in street parade music.²⁰ New Orleans

publishers began to pick up Cuban compositions for piano and other instrumental combinations: in 1858 Blackmar published Espadero's *Meditation* for violin and piano; L. Grunewald released C. Maduella's *Two Cuban Dances*, *Anita*, and *By You* in 1853, followed two years later by the same composer's *Melio Danzon* and *Encarcion Danzon*. These two pieces, along with the some of the danzas included in a "Mexican" series published in New Orleans during the World Cotton Exposition of 1884-85, are in the Cuban mode.²¹ This, however, is not the case with pieces labeled "danza" by the adopted New Orleans composer W. T. Francis, such as *Chloe: Danza Mexicana*, *La Natanja: Danza*, and *El Nopal: Danza Mexicana*, which have a different form and were perhaps called danzas in the generic sense of "dance."²²

The largest body of Latin-flavored music published in late nineteenth-century New Orleans was the Junius Hart Music Company's "Mexican Series." Beginning in 1884, this series included actual Mexican compositions along with pieces billed as Mexican. New Orleans publishers used the designation "Mexican" to market a variety of pieces in the Latin style. Yet the popular Mexican music of the period was strongly influenced by Cuban styles, particularly the ubiquitous habanera (*La Paloma*, for example). Mexico's Gulf cities such as Tampico and Vera Cruz and the Yucatan peninsula were especially affected, with the former providing a New Orleans connection as well in the relocation of the Tio family there in the Eureka colony experiment in 1859.²³ The 1890's saw the publication of more Mexican/Cuban works: Grunewald's releases of *Adelaida, Cuban Dance* by A. Cardona and *Echoes from Mexican and Cuban Shores, Ahora (Now) and Entonces (Then)* by Amelia Cammack. Cammack's *Ahora* is a syncopated danza.



Amelia Cammack's "Echoes from Mexican and Cuban Shores."

while the sequel, *Entonces*, is a Mexican love song.

The Spanish-American War inspired numerous commemorative pieces by New Orleans composers that were published locally, though they display no Cuban or other Latin musical features, but the war may have brought about another kind of musical interaction between New Orleans and Cuba. Although records are scant, some documentation exists on New Orleans musicians who served in this brief action. The best information concerns the musicians of the Onward Brass Band, which traveled extensively to various U.S. cities and had performed in Cuba as early as 1884.²⁴ As an official military unit, a portion of the band was sent to Cuba toward the end of 1898 and were stationed at the San Juan Hill battlefield after the decisive battle. Bandleader "Papa" Jack Laine also

organized a special fifteen-piece band for military duty and participated in local preparations for the war, but the unit never embarked for Cuba because of the signing of the armistice.²⁵ The victory celebration in Laine's neighborhood led by jazz musician Sig Christiansen's father probably included some Cuban or Cuban inspired pieces, such as W. H. Tyers' *Trocha* (1896) or F. H. Losey's *Cuban Sweets* (1895), which were popular and available in commercial band arrangements.

By the turn of the century the northeast section of the French Quarter had a large Hispanic population from various Latin American countries, at least some of whom were Cuban.²⁶ While census records show that the percentage of Cubans migrating to New Orleans was very small compared to that of Mexicans, there may have been a number of musically influential Cubans in the city.²⁷ Recalling the New Orleans musical scene around 1900, the ragtime pianist Roy Carew remembered an "outstanding" Cuban pianist by the name of Gonzales who claimed that ragtime had come from Cuba. Gonzales probably based his claim on the above-mentioned cakewalk style syncopations found in the Cuban danza pieces.²⁸ There were personal connections between New Orleans musicians and Cuba. Trumpeter Manuel Perez had strong Cuban family ties, Jack Laine's wife, Blanche Nunez, was of immediate Cuban descent, and one of Laine's leading cornetists, Manuel Mello, had a job in the sugar business that often took him to Cuba, where he spent a lot of time working in the Oriente province.²⁹

Cuban musical traits continued to surface in New Orleans sheet music after 1900. In 1905 New Orleans composer Paul Sarebresole published *Come Clean*, which is similar in form to a Cuban danza and has a habanera rhythm in its second strain. The

last two measures of the opening strain are identical to that later used by King Oliver in his 1923 recording of *Snake Rag*. The connection shows that New Orleans music was tapping into Caribbean rhythmic traditions in the very years that jazz was emerging. Early New Orleans jazz musicians were certainly aware of the Cuban sounds. Tony Sbarbaro, drummer of the Original Dixieland Jazz Band, commented on what he called the "hot" trumpet playing on early Cuban recordings. He refers to their "dirty mud tone" and the "jazz feeling" of their beat.³⁰ In a 1957 interview, Manuel Manetta notes that as a young musician with Ory in 1917, Louis Armstrong knew just three pieces, which "he played constantly." Two of these, *Wind and Grind* and a slow, untitled blues, have a strong habanera flavor, at least as performed by Manetta in a demonstration.³¹ Oliver's drummer, Baby Dodds, vouches that in his early days New Orleans musicians usually played the blues very slowly and with a "Spanish" rhythm.³² As further evidence, in the ODJB's 1920 recording of *I Lost My Heart in Dixieland*, trombonist Emile Christian plays a habanera bass line behind the cornet-clarinet duet.

In her Tulane master's thesis on the subject, Pamela J. Smith offers considerable analysis of Cuban elements in New Orleans music. She uses such pieces as Jelly Roll Morton's *Creepy Feeling*, *Spanish Swat*, and *The Crave*, Louis Armstrong and Lil Hardin's *New Orleans Stomp* (as recorded by Oliver's Creole Jazz Band in 1923), Natty Dominique and Johnny Dodds' 1928 recording of *Sweet Lorraine*, the Friars Society Orchestra version of *Panama* from 1922, Armand Piron's recording of *West Indies Blues* from 1923, and the New Orleans Owls 1928 recording of *Tampeekoe* to illustrate the prevalence of habanera rhythms and how New Orleans jazz musicians modified them. It was the



Manuel Perez.

extensive employment of such Latin-style patterns in early jazz that Jelly Roll Morton characterized as the "Spanish Tinge." Smith concludes by stating that "the Cuban contradanza, the danza, and the habanera had distinct rhythms that affected early New Orleans jazz compositions. There were other musical styles in Cuba; the Cuban bolero, for example, was a very popular genre throughout Latin America. But it was the danza group--with its variant rhythms and dance forms, the Cuban contradanza containing the germinal rhythm universally popularized by the habanera, and the freedom of the guaracha and the danzon--that most readily translated to New Orleans jazz."³³ S. Frederick Starr comes to a similar conclusion when hailing Manuel Saumell as the absolute master of the contradanza and the "head of the genealogy

of lyrical, syncopated music that extends through Gottschalk to a host of late nineteenth-century Cuban masters and thence to Scott Joplin, Jelly Roll Morton, and other creators of American ragtime."³⁴

There were more peripheral connections between New Orleans musicians and Cuba. Along with Manuel Mello, there were numerous other bandsmen who worked in the many local sugar companies that did business with Cuba. In addition, Cuba and New Orleans shared a cigar-making industry which depended on Cuban tobacco and employed musicians such as Manuel Perez, Natty Dominique, and many others.

What can we observe, by way of summary, about the relationship between the vernacular musics of New Orleans and Cuba? First, that, for all their common ingredients, they are two different musics. The recordings of Cuban bands from early in the century show that African-influenced syncopated patterns are usually found in the underlying rhythmic part with a lyrical, mostly non-syncopated Spanish melody above. The analogous syncopations in American ragtime of the same era, conversely, have such patterns in the upper (right-hand) melody with an unvarying march two-beat in the left hand. The distinctive New Orleans form of ragtime cultivated by composers and pianists ranging from Paul Sarebresole's *Roustabout Rag* (1897) to Jelly Roll Morton's "Spanish tinge" pieces form a kind of musical bridge between these two approaches with left-hand parts that shift flexibly between straight duple meter and lilting tied-note syncopated patterns.

The Cuban popular music of the first quarter of the twentieth century is not simply a kind of New Orleans jazz with a heavy Cuban "tinge." It is distinctively and intensively a Latin dance music, different from North American music with a Cuban

flavor. Careful listening to a representative selection of Cuban recordings from 1906 to 1932 indicates strong parallels to New Orleans music of the same period.

There were many shared elements during this time, and comparative examples are numerous. The riffs in Orquesta Enrique Pena's 1906 recording of *La Gatita Blanca* are similar to the stock arrangement of Barney and Seymore's *St. Louis Tickle* (1904), which was very popular in New Orleans. Orquesta Valdez' *Alza Columbia* in 1907, Orquesta Babuco's *El Premier Gordo* in 1910, and Orquesta Felix Gonzales' *El Deutschland* in 1916 all have a "back beat" similar to that used in early New Orleans recordings. In the Orquesta de Felipe Valdez 1907 recording of *Zapateo Cubano* the cornetist has a style that sounds like that of New Orleans trumpeter Dee Dee Pierce. Orquesta Enrique Pena's recording of *El Automovil* is really *Under the Bamboo Tree* (1902), another popular piece often played by New Orleans bands. On a 1909 record, *Zapateo y Punto*, the Orquesta Pablo Valenzuela uses alternating leads that parallel the sound of George Lewis/Jim Robinson recordings from the 1950's and 1960's, a device that is also alluded to in interviews with several former members of Laine's Reliance bands.

As both Cuban and American musics matured, they borrowed additional elements from each other, specifically in the dance music of the 1920's through the 1940's. The Cuban bands of this era play fox-trots in a rhumba-jazz mode, akin to the many Latin-influenced numbers of the American big bands of the period. By the 1940's, then, the regional musical ties between Cuba and New Orleans were eclipsed by a national embracing of "Cubano-Latino" idioms. However, a palpable Cuban rhythmic tradition--centered in habanera and clave rhythms--continues to subsist in New

Orleans music today. It has become a part of the tradition, attesting to an abiding musical connection that transcends politics.

Jack Stewart

ENDNOTES

1. These three categories for each location are used strictly as a heuristic device for a rough chronological comparison of the two culture's musics and their evolution. This comparison is not perfect, since there is both overlap and ambiguity in trying to contrast any or all of the examples, individually or in groups. A chronology of these Cuban musics has the contradanza introduced circa 1800, the danza circa 1840, the danzon circa 1880, and the son circa 1910. Natalio Galan, *Cuba y sus Sonos* (Valencia: Pre-Textos/Musica, 1983), p. 176; Radames Giro, "Los Motives del Son," *Panorama de la Musica Popular Cubana* (Havana: Facultad de Humanidades, 1995), 213-223.

2. A survey of histories, music criticism, and record liner notes in both musics leaves one almost bewildered with the extremes and strident differences of opinion. One analyst has attempted to resolve the debate by developing three categories of Cuban vernacular music: 1.) The coastal music has the heaviest African influence and includes conga, rhumba, and the clave; 2.) the inland music has the heaviest Spanish influence, with examples in the punto, guajira, and zapateo; 3.) a third type is the most hybrid, containing African and Spanish elements in balanced proportions, including the danza, habanera, danzon, and bolero. Pamela J. Smith, *Caribbean Influences on Early New Orleans Music*, masters thesis, Tulane University, 1986, p. 40.

3. Frenchline, Comagnie Generale

Transatlantique, United Fruit Company, Southern Pacific, and Morgan Steamships were some possibilities, see "The Great White Fleet," *Times-Picayune*, April 23, 1916, B15, c. 8 and "Filleul's Tours," *ibid.*, A10, c. 1.

4. Paul F. LaChance, "The 1809 Immigration of Saint-Domigue Refugees to New Orleans: Reception, Integration and Impact," *Louisiana History*, vol. 29 (1988), 109-141.

5. *Ibid.*

6. Melville J. Herskovits, *Dahomey, an Ancient West African Kingdom*, vol. 1 (New York: J.J. Augustin, 1928), pp. 51-63, 78-95, as quoted in Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Social Control in Slave Plantation Societies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 66.

7. Hall, pp. 54-55.

8. Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, *Africans in Colonial Louisiana* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), *passim*. and Gwendolyn Midlo Hall, "The Formation of Afro-Creole Culture," in *Creole New Orleans*, Arnold R. Hirsch and Joseph Logsdon, eds. (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 55-87.

9. The shortage of musicians that existed in New Orleans in 1810 seems to have eased somewhat a year later, so it is possible (although far from certain) that some of the refugees were musicians. See Henry Kmen, *Music in New Orleans, the Formative Period, 1790-1841* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1966), p. 192.

10. *Courrier de la Louisiane*, April 1, 1816, p. 3 and *Courrier de la Louisiane*, April 5, 1816, p. 3; and *Prospectus for the Olympic Circus*, December 4, 1816.
11. Herbert Asbury, *The French Quarter* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1936), p. 97 includes a quote from George W. Cable's collection of Negro folk-songs found in Lafcadio Hearn, *Historical Sketch Book and Guide to New Orleans* (New York:n.p., 1885): "'Tis Monsieur Gaetano, who comes out from Havana, with his horses and his monkeys!" Asbury also relates a folk tale that says that Gaetano had a tiger and a bison (p. 98). For additional information on Congo Square, see Jerah Johnson, "New Orleans's Congo Square: An Urban Setting for Early Afro-American Culture Formation," *Louisiana History*, vol. 32 (Spring 1991), 117-157.
12. *Courrier de la Louisiane*, April 1 through December 23, 1816, *passim*. and *Gazette de la Louisiane*, January 24, 1818.
13. Henry Kmen, "The Music of New Orleans," in *The Past as Prelude: New Orleans, 1718-1968* (New Orleans: Tulane University, 1968), pp. 210-232.
14. John S. Kendall, *The Golden Age of the New Orleans Theater* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), p. 144.
15. For information on Gabici, see Kmen, "Music in New Orleans," p. 151, Lester Sullivan, "Composers of Color of Nineteenth-Century New Orleans," *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 8, no. 1 (1988), p.54, and Charles E. Kinzer, "The Tio Family and Its Role in the Creole-of-Color Musical Traditions of New Orleans," *The Second Line*, vol. 43, no. 3 (Summer 1991), 19-21.
16. Henry Kmen, "Remember the Virginius: New Orleans and Cuba in 1873," *Louisiana History*, vol. 11, no. 4 (Fall 1970), 313.
17. For information on Elssler and Lind, see Kendall, pp. 176-179 and 273-277.
18. See Vernon Loggins, *Where the World Ends* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1958), pp. 172-197 and S. Frederick Starr, *Bamboula!* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 171-194, 257-260, and 287-309.
19. For discussion of these rhythmic elements, see David A. Jasen and Trebor Tichenor, *Rags and Ragtime* (New York: Dover Press, 1989), pp. 13-18, Hans Nathan, *Dan Emmett and the Rise of Negro Minstrelsy* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1962), pp. 166-174, Winthrop Sargeant, *Jazz: Hot and Hybrid* 3rd ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), pp. 129-131, Peter van der Merwe, *Origins of the Popular Style* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 80, and Virgil Thomson, "Jazz," *American Mercury* (August 1924), p. 466.
20. Pamela J. Smith, *Caribbean Influences on New Orleans Jazz*, masters thesis, Tulane University, 1986, pp. 40-44, Hafiz Shabazz Farel Johnson and John M. Chernoff, "Basic Conga Drum Rhythms in African-American Musical Styles," *Black Music Research Journal*, vol. 11, no. 1 (Spring 1991), p. 68, and Herlin Riley and Johnny Vidacovich, *New Orleans Jazz and Second Line Drumming* (New York: Manhattan Music, Inc., 1995), pp. 76-77.
21. See Smith, p. 17, and John Storm Roberts, *The Latin Tinge* (Tivoli, NY:

Original Music, 1985), pp. 35-36: Roberts has noted that the extent of sheet music from the Junius Hart Mexican series contains one danzon and seven danzas.

22. Peggy C. Boudreaux, *Music Publishing in New Orleans in the Nineteenth Century*, masters thesis, Louisiana State University, 1977, pp. 92-100.

23. Kinzer, p.21.

24. Interview with Jerry Brock, who found evidence of an Onward Brass Band visit to Cuba in 1884 while doing research at the Cuban Archives.

25. For an Onward Brass Band trip to New York in 1891, see Doug Seroff and Lynn Abbott, "100 Years from Today," 78 *Quarterly*, vol. 1, no. 7 (1992), p. 89. According to bandleader Jack Laine's cornetist Ray Lopez, a send-off parade for black troops on their way to Cuba during the Spanish American War featured two bands--one with Buddy Bolden that stayed ashore and another that left with the ship. Research under way by Stephanie Brown and Maureen S. Wright, relatives of Sylvestre Coustaut, the leader/founder of the Onward, suggests that it was the band that sailed. See McCusker article below, as well as Ray Lopez, interview, August 30, 1958, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University and Samuel B. Charters, *Jazz New Orleans, 1885-1963* (New York: Oak Publications, 1963), pp. 7 & 15. For Reliance Band, see Jack Laine interview, May 23, 1960, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

26. Chink Martin, interview, October 19, 1966, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

27. Recent census research by Lawrence

Gushee and his students found very few New Orleans residents of Cuban origin, as compared to large numbers of residents originally from Mexico.

28. See George W. Kay, "Remembering Tony Jackson," *The Second Line* (November-December, 1964), 6.

29. On Perez, see Thomas Fiehrer, "From Quadrille to Stomp: The Creole Origins of Jazz," *Popular Music*, vol. 10 (January 1991), 30. For Nunez, see Jack Laine, interview, May 23, 1960, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University--Mrs. Laine's parents were from Cuba, and she spoke only Spanish until she went to school. Manuel Mello, interview, August 3, 1959, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

30. Tony Sbarbaro, interview, February 11, 1959, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

31. Manuel Manetta, interview, March 28, 1957, Hogan Jazz Archive, Tulane University.

32. Larry Gara, *The Baby Dodds Story* (Los Angeles: Contemporary Press, 1959), p. 11.

33. Smith, pp. 52-53.

34. Starr, p. 184.

The author wishes to extend a special acknowledgement to Elias Barreiro, a Cuban guitarist now teaching at Tulane University, who has recorded many Cuban danzas and has compiled biographical and musical information for *Guitar Music of Cuba* (Pacific, Missouri: Mel Bay Publications, 1996).

THE ONWARD BRASS BAND AND THE SPANISH AMERICAN WAR

The Onward Brass Band of New Orleans was founded some time before 1877 and was composed of reading musicians, many of whom also played with John Robichaux's Orchestra and the Excelsior and Henry Allen Brass Bands. Others played with Buddy Bolden, Edward Clem, Charlie Galloway, and Alphonse Picou. In 1898 when the Spanish-American War broke out, the Onward Brass Band was considered by many to be *the* marching band in New Orleans.

In the summer of that year, the Onward was said to have been recruited for military service in the Ninth Volunteer Infantry Immunes and traveled to Cuba. Samuel Charters' *Jazz New Orleans: 1885 to 1963* and Al Rose and Edmond Souchon's *New Orleans Jazz: A Family Album* both mention the trip. The subject also comes up in several oral histories, including those of musicians Isidore Barbarin and William "Bebe" Ridgley. Apart from these vague references, little in the way of detail has been written about this curious chapter in New Orleans brass band history. The centennial of the trip, and recent information that has surfaced, provide an opportunity to revisit and flesh out the details of the Onward's service in the Ninth Volunteer Infantry Immune Band.

While a journey of a group of New Orleans musicians to Cuba raises the musicological issue of cross-influence between Cuba and New Orleans, that question is not addressed here. The primary goals of this article are to establish who was in the Ninth Volunteer Infantry Band and whether the trip took place as described in previous accounts.

Charters' description of the trip is the most detailed: "On a hot Wednesday

evening in July (1898) a recruiting officer came up on the stand and enlisted most of the band for the Spanish-American War." Later, he mentions James MacNeal, an Onward member who was tapped to lead the group in the military: "He directed the band and led it down New York's Fifth Avenue in one of the great victory parades when the regiment returned to the United States." Charters also makes reference to the trip in the biographies of Onward members Dee Dee Chandler, Oscar Duconge, James MacNeal, and (John) Baptiste Delisle. Rose and Souchon also mention the service of the Onward in their biographies of the same men. This information is not footnoted and might possibly be based on some of the same material as the Charters account. One common source may well be horn player Isidore Barbarin (1872-1960).

Though he did not make the trip himself, Barbarin, a member of the Onward at the time of the war, mentions the group's service in his oral history interview while answering a question about horn player Baptiste Delisle: "He had went to war. He was playing alto when he went to war but he got over there and he took up trombone. He was good at both." Richard Knowles notes the Onward's service in *Fallen Heroes: A History of New Orleans Brass Bands* (New Orleans: Jazzology Press, 1996), but he repeats the Charters information: "A recruiting officer visited the band during a Wednesday evening concert (at Spanish Fort) in July 1898, when most of its members, including Duconge, Delisle, Chandler, MacNeal, and a horn player named Catri (sic), enlisted in the army for the Spanish-American War. The band under the direction of James MacNeal, which became known as the Ninth Immune regimental band, was sent to Cuba. On their return in 1899, they marched down New York's Fifth Avenue in one of the great



The John Robichaux Orchestra circa 1896.

Victory Parades.” This has been the extent of the reported detail of the Onward’s trip to Cuba.

New Information

Genealogical research by descendants of Onward Brass Band leader and arranger Sylvestre Coustaut has recently uncovered information from the National Archives in Washington, DC confirming the military service of several Onward players in the war against Spain 1898-99.

Though their research found that Coustaut did not serve in the war, his great-grandchildren Maureen Wright, Stephanie Brown, and Karen Edwards discovered the muster records of the Ninth Volunteer Colored Infantry on which several Onward members’ names appear. The infantry logs

and muster rolls are a treasure chest of data, providing times, places, birth dates, relations, and other comparative evidence for the aforementioned sources.

This information is similar to, but not a duplicate of, the details found in *The Spanish-American War Volunteer* (1899) by the Ninth’s chaplain, W. Hillary Coston. In that book a roster of the band appears along with muster rolls listing other soldiers who were at various times assigned to the band. A photo of the Ninth, including the band, also appears in the book. Along with this information, newspaper reports of the Ninth volunteer infantry, some of which mention the band, have also been found.

The musicians noted in the Ninth regimental records and Coston’s book include known Onward personnel along with

obscure musicians, including some from Texas, where two of the Ninth's companies were formed. Other surnames bear a resemblance to those of Onward members and other New Orleans musicians, but with different first names. Working from the Coston book and the records found by the Coustaut family, a more complete roster of the band can be pieced together, as follows:

Ninth Volunteer Infantry Band--

Clemon Boudreau

Joseph A. Bryant

Nelson Bush--records say he was from Donaldsonville, LA

Charles Castry--this is possibly the horn player "Catri" that Charters mentions, but it could also be Francois Castry, who made the trip, too. It is not known if they were related. Charles Castry is listed in the 1897 *Souds Directory* as a baker, residing at 2032 St. Ann Street. He was illiterate, marking an X by his name on the muster rolls. The other Castry, who could read and write, was charged with disorderly conduct on November 14, 1898, but records show that, after mitigation, the charges were dropped. This stemmed from an incident involving gunplay with Cuban police and civilians in which several people were killed. One of the Ninth's officers represented Castry in a military hearing according to the Coston book and the National Archives. He was acquitted.

Francois Castry--he enlisted on July 17, 1898 and was named a principal musician. His age is listed on muster records as 35 and his occupation as musician. The *Souds Directory* lists Francois Castry as a yardman, living at 1620 Gasquet Street in 1898. His mother is listed as Susan Castry.

Charles Connery

Floyd Daniels

(John) Baptiste Delisle--an alto horn player who is listed in the muster rolls as age 28

(according to Rose and Souchon, his dates are ca. 1868-1920). Bill Matthews said Delisle came from Algiers and described him as a "real reading up-top trombone player," while "Bebe" Ridgley dubbed him "the master." He was a regular member of the John Robichaux Orchestra and also played with the Excelsior Brass Band. Since he appears in the Robichaux band photograph with a trombone circa 1896, Isidore Barbarin's claim that he learned to play that instrument in Cuba seems unlikely. He joined the Onward about 1890 and Robichaux around 1894. Charters stated that he "had a complete mental breakdown" a few months after discharge. He was committed to an institution and returned to the city to rejoin Robichaux "five years later playing better than ever," according to Barbarin. Donald Marquis says that Delisle played with Bolden--if so, it was probably after the war.

Alfred Domingo

Albert Dowden

Louis Drayton--born ca. 1876, died July 24, 1949. Ridgley said Drayton was the clarinet player in his first band.

Oscar Duconge--he enlisted on July 18, 1898 and was made a principal musician. The muster records indicate that he was a 32 year old professional musician. According to Rose and Souchon, he was born in Napoleonville circa 1870 and died circa 1924. Duconge was the Onward's E-flat cornet soloist, joining them in 1890. The muster record lists him as married and the father of Pete (circa 1900) and Albert (circa 1895) Duconge. Rose and Souchon also place him as playing with Edward Clem and Charlie Galloway and, later, leading a band with Alphonse Picou on clarinet. Isidore Barbarin remembered him as a multi-instrumentalist, playing both woodwind and brass instruments.

Arthur Ellis

Etienne Gaspard--several other musicians named Gaspard are associated with both the Onward Brass Band and the Robichaux Orchestra, including Oke, Ed, and Vic, though their relationship to Etienne is unknown. Etienne Gaspard was fined for fighting and was absent without leave on several occasions.

Streling Henderson--died November 26, 1898 in San Luis, Cuba.

Joseph Hill

Daniel Irving--from Galveston, he died April 14, 1899 in San Luis, Cuba.

James Jackson

August Jones

Edward D. Jones--Charters mentions a trombone player named Ed Jones, as does Eddie Dawson in his oral history.

Charles Kennedy

Octave Lecouq

Charles Lawson

Solomon Lemon

George Lewis

Joseph Lewis

Noble Lindsay--Bill Matthews mentions "Old Man" Lindsay.

James MacNeal--(MacNiel in some sources) a cornetist with John Robichaux, he was the leader of the regimental band, eventually becoming a Second Lieutenant at the war's end. His brother, Wendell, a violinist with Robichaux, also served in the war, but not as a musician. Muster records say he enlisted on June 24, 1898 at age 22. Rose and Souchon gives a circa 1870 birthdate. Like Duconge, he is listed as a musician. He is one of the cornetists pictured in the 1896 Robichaux Band photograph (Rose and Souchon identify him as a charter member of the Robichaux Orchestra and a popular music teacher). He moved to Chicago in 1938 and died there in 1945. MacNeal provided "service honest and faithful" according to his commanding officer's notes.

Samuel Matthews--there were thirteen kids in this Algiers family and all played music, from the noted trombonist and drummer, Bill, to sister Irma, who was a singer. Some other siblings played xylophone. Bill Matthews, in his oral history interview, mentions a brother Sammy "getting killed," which may have happened in Cuba. A granddaughter, Emma Bryant, also confirmed him as a brother of Bill, Remus, and Nathaniel "Bebe" Matthews, and that he had served in Cuba. The family lived at 719 Newton Street and went through various musical associations with Manuel Manetta, Henry Allen, Alphonse Picou, Armand Piron, and Willie Cornish. Most of the boys in the family also played drums, and Bill mentions that both his father and mother played music, in church and elsewhere. According to Rose and Souchon, "Bebe" Matthews was a member of the Onward Brass Band.

Joseph A. Mayfield--a musician who enlisted on June 13, 1898 at age 25. The *Souards Directory* of 1898 lists his occupation as roofer and his address as 1902 Perdido Street. By 1901 he had moved to 2437 Jackson Avenue.

Cornelius Mermillion

William Moseley--this is possibly the Mr. Moseley mentioned in Bat Moseley's oral history interview.

Dennis Patterson

Edgar J. Palao--this is the uncle of the noted violinist James Palao who played with King Oliver's Creole Band and with the Original Creole Orchestra.

Charles Perry

Charles Phillips

Albert Richardson--both the muster records and Coston indicate that he died on September 17, 1899 and was buried near "Surrender Tree" on San Juan Hill. He was a New Orleans native but was probably not related to Samuel Richardson.

Samuel Richardson--from Galveston.

Emmanuel Ridgley--an alto horn player and brother of the Onward trombonist, William "Bebe" Ridgley. A third Ridgley brother, Usam, who played baritone horn, joined the Ninth, but he is not listed in Coston or the muster records as a musician. "Bebe," however, spoke of his brothers playing in "Uncle Sam's Band," suggesting that Usam did play in Cuba. Parenthetically, "Bebe" comments that the Ninth's band did not play any "dance music," by which he presumably meant jazz.

Webster St. Smith

Achilles J. Senegal--born ca. 1865 and died September 5, 1928. Enlisted in New Orleans. No further information.

Peter Thomas

Arthur Van Vector

James Williams--this is probably the cornetist pictured between Baptiste Delisle and James MacNeal in the 1986 Robichaux band photo. He also played with the Excelsior Brass Band and, according to the wife of Arnold Depass, he was a barber by trade. Records indicate that he joined the Army in New Orleans. Louis James mentions a James Williams from Houma who played with the Robichaux and Claiborne Williams bands. James had a son named James who played clarinet according to Arnold Depass.

John G. Williams--he enlisted June 13, 1898 from New Orleans at age 24. Occupation listed as teamster. Relation to James Williams unknown.

John T. Wilson--Rose and Souchon list a bass horn player named John Wilson as a founding member of the Eureka Brass Band.

Edward Zaphery

Conspicuously absent from both Coston's book and the muster rolls at the National Archive is the name of Dee Dee Chandler, the drummer with both the Onward and Robichaux bands. So far, his name has not

come up in any official document, though Rose and Souchon list him as having gone to Cuba.

Other musicians listed in Regimental records include:

Wendell MacNeal--the violin playing brother of James from the Robichaux band picture. Wendell was born ca. 1872 according to Rose and Souchon and is listed as a music teacher living at 1428 Euterpe in the 1900 *Soards Directory*. Rose and Souchon state that he later moved to Detroit. He is not mentioned in Coston's book but does appear in the muster rolls at the National Archive..

Willie Cornish--Born August 1, 1875 and died November 12, 1942. Wife Bella Cornish confirmed the service of Cornish, best known as Buddy Bolden's trombonist, in the Spanish-American War, and a William Cornish does appear on the muster rolls in the Coston book.

Usam Ridgley--brother of "Bebe" and Emmanuel, he was in the infantry but not in the band.

Reevaluation

The inference from Charters that the Onward Brass Band simply became the Ninth Immune Band is not borne out by the above information. Fewer than a dozen men on the list are known Onward members (Delisle, the Castrys, MacNeal, Duconge and probably James Williams, Ridgley, Etienne Gaspard, Samuel Matthews, and Louis Drayton), and several hail from places apart from New Orleans. Whether some of the unknown names on this list were also Onward players or simply recruits from elsewhere remains unclear. Further, the number in the band--twenty-five according to the *Picayune*, forty according to Coston--is far larger than a typical New Orleans brass band. The Onward, for instance, typically numbered a dozen men.

While Charters states that an enlarged version of the Onward played at Spanish Fort, he likely meant a band augmented by a few players, not a group of forty. It is worth remembering that some of the Onward's key musicians, such as Coustaut, did not go to Cuba, thus leaving a residual nucleus of the band at home. Yet, it is noteworthy that the principal musicians of the Ninth, non-commissioned officers in charge of training and leading the group, were Onward members: Duconge, MacNeal, and Francois Castry. This suggests that the recruiting officers saw a level of excellence among the Onward musicians that they wanted to impose as a standard for the Ninth's band. These players were known to be among the best reading musicians in the New Orleans African-American community.

Recruitment

According to Charters, the Onward Brass Band was approached and recruited while playing their regular Wednesday night job at Spanish Fort. While several members of the Onward joined, they did not, as Charters suggests, all join on the same day. Many joined in June and August--not just July as cited by Charters--while some musicians already in training as soldiers were later transferred to the band. Conversely, some others were transferred out of the band, usually for disciplinary reasons.

The unit records state that the actual enlistment took place at the corner of South Rampart and Perdido Street, where the recruiting office was set up on June 10, 1898. As of that date, Colonel Charles Crane and a few officers were the only members of a regiment which would grow to more than 1,000 men. The majority of them were from the New Orleans area, although some were recruited in Donaldsonville, Galveston (Company G), and Houston (Company I). Company A, the first to be

organized, mustered in on June 17, and by August there were eleven more.

Most of the recruits of Company A were members of an independent militia group in New Orleans called The Faith Cadets, founded by Dr. George H. Nelson, trombonist Louis Nelson's father. African-American militias, which existed throughout the Reconstruction Era in Louisiana, were banned during the emergence of the Jim Crow laws in the 1890's. However, when the Spanish-American War broke out, Nelson hung a flag on his porch and began to sign up men for the service. He turned this group over to the Ninth on June 17, 1898. The odd designation "Immunes" grew out of a notion that Black men would not be susceptible to diseases such as malaria or yellow fever. This myth was dispelled very shortly after the unit's arrival in Cuba, when practically the whole regiment fell ill. During the Ninth's tour of duty there, musicians Albert Richardson, Solomon Lemon, Sterling Henderson, and Daniel Irving died of yellow fever or malaria. Ironically, records show that the incidence of malaria among the so-called "Immunes" was actually higher than that of other soldiers.

The Ninth infantry encamped at the New Orleans Fairground race track--referred to as Camp Corbin on the muster rolls in homage to Army Adjutant General X.X. Corbin. A photograph made in the summer of 1898 at the fairgrounds site includes African-American soldiers. Here the units drilled, though records show that they had no equipment through July. Colonel Crane said the discipline was good, though the rules were apparently lax given newspaper reports that the men could leave camp and entertain visitors on the grounds. The photo of the encampment shows civilian horse and buggies and visiting women and children.

Days before the unit shipped out, Private Willie Garrett, a Ninth Infantryman, was



The Immune Band: Ninth United States Infantry Band.

involved in a shoot out at Liberty and Perdido Street. The soldier was tracked down by a mob and shot by Deputy Sheriff Emile Bagretto from nearby Orleans Parish Prison. Garrett's offense was unclear in the newspaper accounts, yet the event was front page news and created considerable controversy. In the paper a few days later, the deputy's actions were described as justifiable. The *Bee* claimed that Colonel Crane averted a riot when he prevented his men from arming themselves and going after Bagretto. The incident created a negative public image for the Ninth in the New Orleans press, which began to invoke pejorative racial characterizations of the unit whenever the opportunity arose, as seen in Coston's book: "The organization of the 9th USVI was not accomplished without great difficulty and labor. From the inception of the movement to raise this regiment to the hour of its embarkation for Cuba it was

opposed and the most malignant attacks were made upon its patriotic and intrepid origin."

On to Cuba

The infantry struck camp and marched on August 17, 1898 from the race track down Esplanade Avenue to the Mississippi River, where they boarded the steamer S.S. Berlin for their three day trip to Santiago, Cuba. The ship had arrived on August 12, according to the *Picayune*, and had taken troops from New Orleans to Cuba on previous occasions. The procession from the Fairgrounds to the waiting steamer was a major event in the Black community, so much so that even the daily newspapers covered it. Though seen through the eyes of an obviously biased observer, the enthusiasm among the African-American crowd was unmistakable. Prominent citizens, including the son of

former governor P.B.S. Pinchback, had joined the unit. The Ninth was clearly a source of pride in the community, though the tension from the Garrett shooting was still palpable. Rumors spread that an armed white mob planned to ambush the unit as they boarded the ship, but no attack materialized, perhaps because of the huge African-American turnout for the troops. The August 18 *Daily Picayune* speculated that the entire Black population of the city must have been present on the route from the Fairgrounds to the wharf--everyone wanted to catch a glimpse of the Immunes: "Esplanade Avenue had chocolate borders yesterday from early in the morning until Col. Crane's colored immunes passed around 3:30 o'clock on its way to the big transport which will carry it to Santiago de Cuba. Then a surging sea of Senegambians swept all over the Northeastern fruit wharf at the head of Mandeville St where the Berlin was lying....To the onlooker, it seemed that every Negro within 100 miles of New Orleans must have witnessed the departure of the Negro troops. There were thousands and thousands of them."

The regimental band apparently made an impression on the *Picayune* and *Times-Democrat* writers because both mention them in their articles. In each case positive comments (couched amid flurries of racist remarks) suggest the band must have been exceptional to reap such praise: The band attached to the Ninth US volunteers is a good one. There are some 25 members and they have been well supplied with brass instruments and stirring march music. They helped to enliven the day by playing during the morning hours at the fairgrounds and later on the march out Esplanade Avenue" (*Daily Picayune*, August 18, 1898). On the same date *The Times-Democrat* offered a similar perspective: "Just before 4 o'clock strains of music heralding the approach of

the regiment were borne to the ears of the waiting multitude and a big rush was made for good positions. At the head of the regiment rode Colonel Crane, his lieutenant colonel and his adjutant. They were followed by the regimental band. As it reached the wharf the musicians struck up "Dixie." As the air blared out thousands of throats gave vent to the wildest cheering and for ten minutes one could hardly hear oneself think."

There are minor contradictions between various newspaper accounts, but not any of significance. One article says the unit boarded the Berlin at Lafayette Dock, while another mentions the "Northeastern fruit wharf" at Mandeville Street. The rest of the accounts are consistent.

Neither news story resembles the scene described by musician Ray Lopez in his oral history. In it he says he witnessed the embarkation of the regiment bound for Cuba and that Bolden's band played for it. As the ship pulled away, Bolden began to play "Home, Sweet Home" and the departing troops were overcome with emotion, some going so far as to jump into the river, instruments and all. Lopez states that the soldiers marched down to the river at St. Louis Street to board what he describes as "a big transport" (the Berlin was 510 feet long). He recalled that many soldiers carried banjos, violins, and other instruments. Then he mentions another band aboard the ship: "So the band gets on the boat. The boat pulls out and the band's playing everything, see? And Buddy Bolden's band starts up "Home." I'm telling you, that was it. More banjos coming over the side of that transport. Over the side the boys went--they couldn't, they just couldn't take it. Had banjos and violins floating on that river for a week....when the band played, that was it--to hell with Cuba." This dramatic scene is unique to Lopez's account. The *Picayune*

description of the Berlin's departure is quite ordinary, stating that it gently pulled away from the dock, circled, and headed down river at 6:10 p.m. Lopez's reference to Bolden is plausible, however. With known Bolden sidemen Cornish and Delisle shipping out with the Ninth, it is likely that he would be there to send them off.

Movements in Cuba

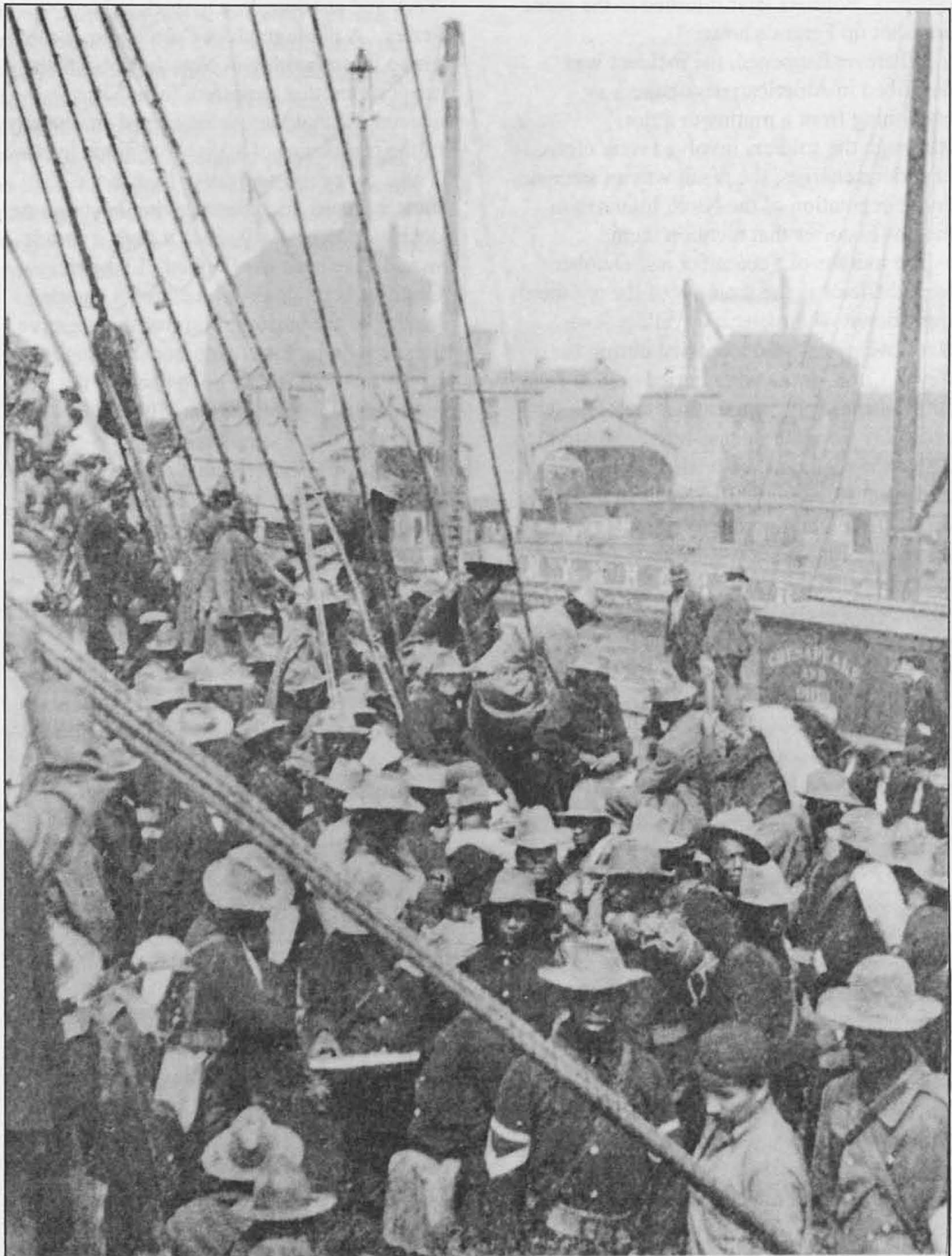
Unfortunately, the group's departure from New Orleans is the last known written reference to the band playing. The duty record notes that the regiment paraded and drilled during the weeks in Cuba, but no specific mention of performance is made: "Daily drills in school of company and Battalion, with regimental parade. Also regimental outpost and cossack post drill." Upon their arrival on Cuban soil, the regiment marched to and encamped on San Juan Hill, site of the famous Rough Riders battle of July 1, 1898. Muster rolls reveal that "during stay on San Juan Hill the regiment was employed for first ten days in drilling, guarding property on the wharf, guarding Spanish prisoners for 4 days, guarding abandoned camps of 5 corps and in hauling tentage etc belonging to those camps." The regiment was involved in some minor skirmishes, including one in March that resulted in a soldier being shot by bandits, but the majority of the service in Cuba was spent guarding prisoners and plantations.

An exception occurred in November which made the Immunes known throughout the country, although exactly what happened remains unclear. According to a Ninth Volunteer Infantry muster roll dated



Company C en route to San Luis

December 29, 1898: "On Nov 14 a difficulty occurred within guard limits of the regiment between a band of mounted Cuban police & other parties whom as yet have not been discovered; of the latter some are supposed to have been soldiers. During the melee about 50 shots were fired with result that one soldier of the 9 U.S.V.I., two Cuban police and two Cuban civilians were killed. The shooting ceased upon arrival of Co. A and all armed men were arrested. The Cubans implicated were released on the 15 (of December) by order Department Commander." The depiction given by Willard B. Gatewood, Jr. in *Smoked Yankees and the Struggle for Empire: Letters from Negro Soldiers, 1898-1902* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1971) is less flattering: "There are frequent spats between them (Cubans) and American soldiers....A drunken soldier from the Ninth stole a pig from Jose Ferara. A Cuban policeman attempted to arrest them but they



The Ninth Immunes return.

escaped. Soldiers later returned to the scene and shot up Ferrara's house."

Whatever happened, the incident was described in American newspapers as everything from a mutiny to a riot. Although the soldiers involved were cleared of serious charges, the result was an asterisk on the reputation of the Ninth Infantry in the few histories that mention them.

The months of September and October were difficult as the majority of the regiment came down with malaria or yellow fever. Over twenty enlisted men died during the stay in Cuba--some were buried on San Juan Hill. Muster rolls suggest that men fell out every day from the intense heat: "About the 2 Sept the regiment was visited by a fever epidemic which grew till Sept 12th when it was at its height. Number of enlisted men who died of fever 17." While it is tempting to assume that the band would have played for these funerals, no details of burial services appear on the roster or in Coston. The New Orleans brass band funeral is, of course, rooted in the martial tradition, and the notion of a military band featuring New Orleans musicians playing a funeral in a military context is intriguing, but soldiers were not permitted to make such decisions for themselves.

At the end of the Ninth's service (April 9, 1899), Major General Leonard Wood wrote a letter to Colonel Crane commending him and the unit: "It gives me great pleasure to assure you that I have always found your regiment to be efficient, well instructed and well disciplined and that its services taken as a whole have been excellent and creditable. The work done by the officers of the regiment in the suppression of bandits during the last two months has been especially worthy of commendation." On April 26, 1899 the Ninth boarded the steamer S.S. Meade in Santiago to return to the United States. They arrived in New

York and continued on to dock in New Jersey. A photograph in Coston shows the group disembarking in New Jersey, which suggests another departure from Charters' account, in that there is no record among any of the companies of a Victory Parade in New York. Since most of the entries in the muster record include even the most minute details, it seems unlikely that such a parade would have been overlooked. Likewise, Coston's book does not mention a parade, leading to the presumption that the negative press attending the November shooting may have prompted the Army to exclude the ninth from its celebrations. The group mustered out at Camp Meade in Middletown, Pennsylvania, on May 25, 1899 and was sent back home. Another photograph of the band was taken there. They got two months extra pay by act of Congress.

Future study

With details of the Onward's trip to Cuba in hand, what can we make of it? At the very least, the muster rolls of the Ninth Immunes provides a vignette of a group of pre-jazz New Orleans musicians who were contemporaries of Buddy Bolden. They were the musical generation preceding Joe Oliver, Jelly Roll Morton, Edward Ory, and the Dodds brothers, and their yearlong hiatus in Cuba must have affected the New Orleans music scene, at least a little. One might say that with the Onward Brass Band and the John Robichaux Orchestra at war, certain opportunities must have opened up back home. Of the eight men pictured in the 1896 Robichaux photograph, at least half enlisted in the Immunes. Was the vacuum left by prominent cornetists such as Ducongé and MacNeal an incentive for the arrival of younger men like Bolden and Manuel Perez? An even more elusive question is the influence, if any, the exposure to Cuban

music may have had on the New Orleans bandsmen. Did this brief sojourn serve as a catalyst in the emergence of "Spanish tinge" rhythms in early New Orleans jazz? Or was it nothing more than an exotic escapade, a marching gig in a foreign country, that had no discernable impact on the way music was made in New Orleans. Wherever future study will lead, it will certainly include some time in Cuba.

John McCusker

PICTURING THE PAST



Manuel Perez Band at the Knights of Pythias Roof Garden circa 1923: sitting (l-r) Alfred Williams, Earl Humphrey, Eddie Cherie, Adolphe Alexander, Caffrey Darensbourg; standing: Osceola Blanchard, Manuel Perez, Maurice Durand, and Jimmy Johnson. An important jazz site, the Pythian Temple building is in danger of demolition.

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